



# NEWS RELEASE

---

*RIVERSIDE COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICE*

*Larry Parrish  
County Executive Officer*

June 28, 2004

**TO: All media**

**FROM: Ray Smith, Riverside County (909) 955-1130**

**RE: Landmark Riverside County conservation plan approved**

---

RIVERSIDE – State and federal regulators on Tuesday (June 22) approved Riverside County’s far-reaching Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan, issuing permits required to implement the plan and proceed with creating a proposed 500,000-acre reserve system in the western county.

Lauded by the White House, the conservation plan has been recognized nationwide as an innovative solution for addressing environmental protection while building economic strength in the community.

The conservation plan’s proposed reserve system protects habitat for 146 species. State and federal funds, as well as money from development-impact fees, will help purchase 153,000 privately held acres in western Riverside County. Coupled with 350,000 acres already publicly owned or protected, the reserve will provide vast habitat areas as well as corridors allowing animals to travel throughout their ranges.

The plan not only protects the environment it will help keep the economy vibrant, Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley said.

“We cannot ignore the reality that we are a growing community,” Ashley said. “Our economy would literally freeze-up over the next few years if not for this plan.”

State and federal regulatory agencies have endorsed the plan’s more global approach to conservation, which fulfills environmental laws requiring protection for habitat land and species. Streamlined environmental review provides faster approval for road and mass-transit projects, as well as other public facilities vital to the region’s economy.

Riverside County Supervisor John Tavaglione recalled that, because of concerns about a single species, approval for a freeway overpass in his district took 12 years.

“This plan helps us eliminate those kinds of problems,” said Tavaglione, initially a skeptic but now one of the conservation plan’s staunchest supporters. “It’s made us believers because it strikes a balance between protecting the environment and allowing for managed growth.”

On Tuesday, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved a Section 10 (a)(1)(B) permit. Also received was a Natural Community Conservation Planning permit from the California Department of Fish and Game. The permits authorize incidental take of the 146 species in western Riverside County in compliance with the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

( -- more -- )

Robert T. Andersen Administrative Center  
4080 Lemon Street • 4<sup>th</sup> Floor • Riverside, California 92501 • (909) 955-1110 • Fax (909) 955-1105

Land for the reserve system will be acquired over the next 25 years and purchased only from owners willing to sell their property. About 20,000 acres of the proposed 153,000 acres already has been acquired or is in the process of being acquired.

Supervisor Roy Wilson, chairman of the Board of Supervisors, praised the cooperation he observed during the five-year process needed to hammer out agreement on the conservation plan. Participants included environmental groups, regulatory agencies, business leaders, cities and property owners.

"We didn't always agree and we still don't all agree on every issue. But we all came together and worked out our differences through compromise because it was vital to Riverside County's future," he said. "Now we have a clear direction."

A ceremonial signing is being planned but a date for the event has not yet been set. With the permit approvals, the community will now embark on implementing the conservation plan.

"We still have a long road. But five years ago, no one would have believed we could be at this point today," Tavaglione said. Those sentiments resounded among others who played crucial roles in developing and approving the plan.

"With the sustained commitment of the county, cities and stakeholders, we have finally reached the finish line," said Jim Bartel, Field Supervisor of the Fish and Wildlife office in Carlsbad. "This is a tremendous victory in the effort to balance conservation of native species and their habitats with future economic growth."

Robin Lowe, chairperson of the Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority, said the cities, county and other stakeholders in the plan always kept their focus on the future.

"This is a partnership that has overcome so many speed bumps," she said. "It reinforces the cities' independence to determine their own future without outside interference."

California Secretary for Resources Mike Chrisman also lauded the farsighted plan.

"This local, state and federal partnership is a visionary example of how to better protect open space and wildlife for future generations," Chrisman said. "This is coordinated local planning at its very best."

In partnership, all 14 cities in western Riverside County have adopted the plan. Other state, federal and local agencies also are participating. Below is a complete list of plan participants:

United States Fish and Wildlife Service; California Department of Fish and Game; County of Riverside; the cities of Banning, Beaumont, Calimesa, Canyon Lake, Corona, Hemet, Lake Elsinore, Moreno Valley, Murrieta, Norco, Perris, Riverside, San Jacinto and Temecula; Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority; Riverside County Flood Control and Water Conservation District; Riverside County Regional Parks and Open Space District; Riverside County Waste Management District; Riverside County Transportation Commission; California Department of Transportation; California Department of Parks and Recreation

For more information contact public information officer Ray Smith at (909) 955-1130.

(-30-)